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of good talk, that is neither "highbrow" nor dull; but they were written for British readers.

DEFINITIONS. By Henry Seidel Canby, Ph.D. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.

Professor Canby is a writer from whom one expects much, his essays being generally of such a character as to provoke the paradoxical criticism that they are so good that they ought to be better. His humor is so incisive that one would have him always humorous: his originality is so suggestive that one sometimes wishes he were not quite so sensible: his judgment is so sound that one wishes he would enlarge the scope and the thoroughness of his considerations.

The essays in this book, like much of this writer's output, are, however, roughly classifiable into two tolerably distinct groups—the academic and the vital. By academic one does not of course mean stiff, labored or wholly futile. Just what one does mean is perhaps best indicated by a sample. In the last paragraph of his essay on *To-day in American Literature*, Professor Canby writes: "In literature we are still pioneers. I think it may be reserved for us to discover a literature for the new democracy of English-speaking peoples that is coming—a literature for the common people who do not wish to stay common. Like Lincoln's, it will not be vulgar; like Whitman's, never tawdry; like Mark Twain's, not empty of penetrating thought; like Shakespeare's it will be popular. If this should happen, as I believe it may, it would be a just return upon our share of a great inheritance."

Now this is extremely well said. It is quite remarkable, indeed, that anything so nearly inspiring should emerge as the conclusion of an essay upon such a subject as *To-day in American Literature*. Yet the whole theme is almost purely academic, its real interest confined within the narrow circle of literary "questions"—the stock topics of the student. In spite of Professor Canby's art, there is a kind of traditional smugness in the first and last sentences, and one cannot find much profit in a point of view which shifts the emphasis from art to American art, from what is good in American literature to what sort of thing literature must be in order to be both good and American.

By way of contrast one may take nearly the whole of what Professor Canby has written about the younger generation—a considerable and significant section of his book. Nearly all of this is vital. The young realists of the day, he sees, for example are really young romanticists; their literature is an unmeasured expression of protest. "As one considers the excessive naturalism of the young realists and asks just why they find it necessary to be so excessively, so effusively, realistic, the conviction is inborn that they are not realists at all as Hardy, Howells, even James, were realists; they are romanticists of a deep, if not the deepest dye even the heartiest lover of sordid incident among them all." This is a precise description of what has been frequently referred to in these pages as the New Romance. This new naturalism, continues Professor

Canby, is essentially "a propaganda of the experience of youth, where the fact that mother's face was ugly, not angelic, is supremely important, more important than the story, just because it was the truth."

This, and much more, of similar tenor is as shrewdly and warmly penetrating as Professor Canby's remarks, in other volumes, upon college students, their minds and ways. On the whole, more of Professor Canby's essays have something of this vital quality than altogether lack it.

BABBITT. By Sinclair Lewis. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.

A cheap, vulgar life is cheap and vulgar! This appears to be the real message of the new novel by the author of *Main Street*. There is, to be sure, a suggestion of another note formerly not strange to Mr. Sinclair,—the joy of working out one's own salvation, or trying to,—but this spirit is only a weak infusion. In his later novels, indeed, this author seems to have shifted his emphasis from the more or less unreal (but entirely possible) individual who rebels against a real environment, to the more or less unreal environment which slays the individual. There is a gain in technique, perhaps, but scarcely in significance.

The significance of this central idea can in no way be proved. *Babbitt* is not a picture of American life; American life is too big to be pictured in a single novel. Besides everyone knows that while Babbitt, a real-estate man, has no philosophy but that of "hustle", no wit but that of coarse chaff, and is ignorant about many things, such as drainage, that pertain to his specialty, you cannot have half-an-hour's chat with the average American—garage man, architect—without discovering more sense and knowledge than Babbitt is ever allowed to possess. Your garage man will tell you something of the idiosyncrasies of women who drive cars, or are driven in them; your architect will tell you how it is that school-buildings may be made not only fire-proof but panic-proof, and both will have really good ideas about bringing up children. Babbitt and his group are not typical of America.

But are they not typical of some small section or stratum of American life? If so—and America is so various that one cannot deny it—then they are not pictured with the careful Balzacian realism necessary to make them true.

No, the truth is, *Babbitt* is simply a satire—a monstrous, bawling, unconscionable satire, on phases of American life that Mr. Lewis happens to have chosen and which he has concentrated arbitrarily and quite unnaturally into a single-life story. Mr. Lewis is the most phenomenally skillful exaggerator in literature to-day. In his sour way he excels the cheerful mendacities of Mark Twain, whose whimsy about the man who was caught in the carpet-weaving machine and woven into ten yards of Brussels carpet cannot compare in egregiousness with some of Mr. Lewis's realism. Mr. Lewis cannot really parody the advertisements of those who profess to teach will power, public speaking, and how to succeed—though he tries even this. But he is fairly successful with Billy Sunday. In the story, the Reverend Mike Monday